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## NOTE ON THE "MOURNING ATHENA" RELIEF

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I WAS much interested in Miss Florence M. Bennett's article on "The So-called Mourning Athena," published in this JOURNAL, XIII, 1909, pp. 431-446. The elusive charm of the relief in question compels interest in everything that is written about it, and Miss Bennett's theory involves some points of considerable importance. Her main thesis is that the pillar in the relief is "the aniconic representation of Athena" (*l.c.* p. 433).

The first objection to be made would seem to be that the use of the word "pillar" at all in connection with this relief is not justified. Mr. Fairbanks (*A.J.A.* VI. pp. 410-416), whose article Miss Bennett takes as her point of departure, says near the beginning of his paper, "It is the received opinion that this 'pillar' represents an inscribed stele"; and, though he does not continue to use inverted commas for the word, it is clear that he only uses it as a convenient name for the object represented. His own conclusion is that "this type of pillar on vases ordinarily denotes the *meta* or goal-post of the race-course," and that it is here "the symbol of the palaestra"; but his paper is concerned more particularly with the figure of the goddess, while Miss Bennett deals with the object at which she is looking. This object seems very unlike any ordinary form of pillar; what the spectator sees is apparently the narrow end of a squared block of stone, somewhat roughly hewn, and the goddess is seemingly looking at the broad face of it, on which, according to the older theory, there would be an inscription. The stone may be the *meta*, as Mr. Fairbanks argues, though there seem to be many objections to his view; but it has absolutely no resemblance to any of the pillars appearing in representations of Athena, given by Miss Bennett in support of her

contention. All of these, with one possible exception—the Lansdowne relief—show pillars of rounded form. Of the pillar in the Lansdowne relief, Miss Bennett says (*l.c.* p. 436, Fig. 4), "the shaft is partially concealed by the shield, so that it is difficult to make out whether the pillar is square or circular in section. It is more probably the former." I should say, "more probably the latter," but the point is unimportant here, as the Doric capital makes it absolutely certain that a pillar, whether square or round, is depicted. May we not go further and inquire whether any aniconic representation of a deity can be quoted at all resembling the stone in this Mourning Athena relief? Do not all such *stone* representations belong either to the pillar type or to the class of baetylic stones, such as the omphalos at Delphi, of which Frazer gives a list in his note on Pausanias, X, 16. 3? The fact that Apollo Ἀγυιεύς was represented by a conical block of stone placed before the door is well known,<sup>1</sup> and these conical stones often appear on coins,<sup>2</sup> associated both with Apollo and with other deities, *e.g.* Zeus and Artemis. In my article on "The Cults of Olbia," (*J.H.S.* XXII, p. 258, Fig. 3), I quoted a late coin of Olbia, on which Apollo appears with his left hand resting on a pillar, and I suggested (*l.c.* p. 255) that this pillar represented the early cult image of Apollo, possibly brought with them by the early colonists from Miletus. There is nothing unusual in the presence of both an iconic and an aniconic representation of a deity in the same work of art, but is that deity ever Athena? Farnell (*Cults of the Greek States*, I, p. 321) says, "We have no proof of the prevalence of wholly aniconic images of Athena, and it has been shown that the religion of Pallas contained comparatively few 'survivals' of primitive thought and primitive ritual. The earliest monuments that have come down to us express ideas that are already relatively advanced." The words of Tertullian, quoted by Miss Bennett, according to Farnell, "seem to refer to some formless ἄγαλμα in Attica, of the existence of which we know nothing."

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *e.g.* Harpocration, *s.v.* Ἀγυιάς. Ἀγυιεύς δέ ἐστι κίων εἰς ὃν λήγων, ὃν ἰστᾶσι πρὸ τῶν θυρῶν. ἰδίους δὲ εἶναι φασιν αὐτοὺς Ἀπόλλωνος.

<sup>2</sup> See note in *Cults of Olbia*, *l.c.* p. 255, and Daremberg and Saglio, *s.v.* Baetylia, etc.

To sum up, then, the objections to Miss Bennett's view :

(1) The object in the "Mourning Athena" relief is certainly neither a pillar nor a baetylic stone, but a rough-hewn block, quite unlike any of the recognized aniconic representations of deities.

(2) We have no authority for the idea that Athena was ever represented in aniconic form, either by stone or pillar.

The real meaning of the relief I must leave for experts to decide, but there must be many who will not readily give up the older view that the head is bowed in mourning. The whole pose of the figure seems to mark dejection; there is, perhaps, nothing in ancient or modern art which expresses the idea of grief with such poignant simplicity and artistic restraint.

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